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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines three school award programs: the Ford program, the Secretary of Education's Program, and the For Character Program (Chicago). In providing descriptions of each program, the similarities and differences are analyzed. The programs share three basic assumptions: (1) that some schools are better managed than others and that elements of good management can be identified, (2) that administrators will respond to competition, and finally, (3) that enough is known about school effectiveness to justify an award process. The author reflects that the programs are noncompulsory, making them more adaptable and experimental. He also points out that such programs should not be carried out too casually or they will lose their legitimacy. Finally, he feels the award structures should identify a number of "winners" and provide incentives to reward all participants. (MD)

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SCHOOL AWARD PROGRAMS:

PUTTING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

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Abstract

"School Award Programs: Putting Effective School Research into Practice," generally discusses the nature of such programs and briefly describes some of the significant programs in operation now or in the recent past. The characteristics of the programs are discussed and similarities and differences are analyzed. The paper concludes with a discussion of factors which may affect the future effects of award programs. - Author

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School Award Programs:

Putting Effective School Research Into Practice

Ralph Waldo Emerson made the famous observation: "If a man write a better book, preach a better sermon, or invent a better mousetrap than his neighbors, though he live in the woods, the world will beat a path to his door." However, despite the fine literary style of the observation, its correctness is problematic.

There is a vast literature which emphasizes that the transfer of innovations is a complex and often arduous process (see, e.g., Carlson, 1971; Rogers, 1967). The problem of barriers to innovation is especially relevant for people concerned with effective schools research. After all, a major aim of that research has been to identify variables associated with effective schools--so other schools will adopt such successful policies. But, Emerson to the contrary, we cannot assume that the educational world will beat a path to our discoveries, regardless of their substantive merits. If we hope to stimulate the diffusion of our findings to schools, we must be first concerned with the topic of incentives for improvement.

The literature about innovation has emphasized that the incentive systems around potential adaptors is an important factor affecting innovation decisions. Coleman (1971) argues that if many schools are not now "effective", one cause of their "ineffectuality" is the lack of incentives for them to seek or invent appropriate inventions. Thus, the development of better incentive systems is an important element for encouraging the spread of effective school practices.

Interestingly enough, there are signs that shifts in education incentive systems are now underway. At least three school award and recognition pro-

grams based on the effective school research are now in operation. This paper will describe and contrast these programs, paying special attention to the program sponsored by For Character, Chicago. (The author has served as consultant to that particular program.) Undoubtedly there are also other award programs in operation, or in the planning stage. The appearance of such programs is an appropriate outcome of the effective school research: as we begin to identify policies associated with effective schools, it is logical to reward schools which apply such policies (Wynne, 1980a). However, as one might expect, there is a difference between the general acceptance of this principle of recognition, and its application in specific award programs. A discussion of the principle and the differences in application can be productive at this comparatively early stage. But first, for brief sketches of the relevant programs:

The Ford Program

The Ford Foundation has established an award program to recognize selected comprehensive city public high schools (with at least 30% of the students from low-income families) (1982a & b). The program has been targeted at over thirty cooperating urban public school systems. Schools in systems which choose to compete submit a relatively thorough information form, which might take 8-12 hours to complete. The form asks them to describe the operation of their school via statistical and narrative information, including matters such as test score outcomes, socio-economic data, the racial and sex mix of their staff, and the various programs carried out in the school. To provide a base for comparison, the competing schools are required to contrast their most recent year's performance with some previous (self-selected) base year. After schools are screened via the data in the form, they are subject to site vis-

its. In 1981-82, 110 winning schools were provided with $1,000 "Recognition Awards" to support the creation or continuation of programs described in the written report. The winners were chosen from 225 participating schools. In the Fall of 1982, 50 of the Recognition Award winners received grants of $20,000 each to further improve the operation of their programs. The names of the 50 selected schools, and of their principals, were listed in a national press release by the Foundation (1982b). The panel of advisors making the final determination for the Foundation included fifteen persons. They were associated with various national organizations concerned with education issues; some of these organizations represented professional interests, others parents or minority groups. Another cycle of applications, recognition awards (of $1,000) and grants (of $20,000) is being conducted by the Foundation for the 1982-83 academic year.

The Secretary of Education's Program

In January 1983, Terrel Bell, the United States Secretary of Education, announced the creation of a nationwide school recognition program for public high and junior high schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1983). Each chief state school officer was invited to identify and submit the names of five high schools and five junior high schools. Review panels of non-governmental experts will then distill the 500 nominees down to 100 winners. The announcement was vague about the criteria to be used for identification, or the process to be followed in making award decisions. Undoubtedly, further policies will be developed as the program proceeds. Of course, sophisticated observers know that other federal programs have started with some fanfare, and then gradually evaporated. Still, the creation of this program may attain special significance since the effort is congruent with some of the other independent efforts described in this paper.

The For Character, Chicago, Program

A not-for-profit corporation called For Character, Chicago, is conducting a school award program in the Chicago area. The program is open to all schools in the area: public and private; urban and suburban; and elementary and secondary. The organization plans to develop some system of weighting, so competing schools will be compared to schools in approximately equivalent situations, e.g., church-related elementary schools will only be compared to other church-related elementary schools. About fifteen categories of award winners will be identified.

The first cycle of the program has been underway during the the 1982-83 school year. The 20-member governing board of the organization is broadly representative of the major elementary and secondary school systems in the Chicago area, both public and private. For example, a consultant to the Chicago Catholic Archdiocese School System is a member of the board, as well as a number of public school superintendents, administrators and principals. The co-chairs of the board are a suburban superintendent and the principal of an inner-city Chicago public high school. An Awards Committee has also been formed, the majority of whose members are independent from the corporate board, and who are not responsible for the operation of any schools or school systems. The Awards Committee is responsible for making the final award designations.

All Chicago area schools were invited to participate in the 1982-83 program. A first screening of applicants is made via a 35-item questionnaire, which generates computer-processable answers (For Character, Chicago, 1983a). An informed person can answer the questionnaire in about a half hour. Schools which pass this screening are invited to complete more detailed (and qualita-

tive) forms, and cooperate with a site visit. The data about final contestants will be turned over to the Awards Committee for their determinations. Awards will be announced in May, 1983, and an awards banquet held in the Fall of 1983. It is hoped that a booklet will be produced describing the programs and policies of the winning schools.

There will be no cash awards. Each winner will receive an attractive plaque, and each participating school will receive a certificate of participation. The form of the certificate and plaque are shown in the appendix (For Character, Chicago, 1983b).

The items on the questionnaire reveal the particular thrust of For Character, Chicago's awards criteria. The items are concerned with both the cognitive and character-development aspects of school policies. Apropos of cognition, the questionnaire does not deal with test scores, but focuses on pro-learning processes, e.g., the assignment and monitoring of homework, staff cohesion, effective supervision of staff, the stimulation and recognition of academic attainment by students. As for "character development," the form defines that largely in terms of:

(a) Student engagement in pro-social conduct, i.e., evident, visible acts of helpfulness to others, in the school or in school-sponsored activities. The questionnaire lists a great many such activities, and asks the respondents to estimate their frequency for their school. The activities include matters such as student-to-student tutoring, service clubs, team sports, and fundraising. The respondents are also asked to check the ways such activities are rewarded, and excellent participation stimulated.

(b) Student avoidance of anti-social conduct, i.e., the discipline level in the school. Questions are asked about the discipline code, the degree of enforcement, provisions for parental involvement, and the punishment of violators.

Respondents may shade some of the answers to the questionnaire (to produce a good impression). However, the form's designers believe that gross distortion will be difficult. Furthermore, the promise of later, more detailed reports and site visits will also tend to stimulate frank replies. The recognition process also assumes that categories of respondents can be identified, and statistical norms developed for the replies in each category. Then, appropriate intra-category comparisons can be made, and the "winners" identified.

The For Character, Chicago, board is also interested in stimulating a sense of engagement and cooperation among all participating schools. All participants will be invited to permit the publication of their school names (to facilitate the exchange of ideas), and to attend the awards banquet. The certification of participation may be conspicuously posted in schools. Perhaps conferences and other forms of communication can develop to disseminate effective school program perspectives.

Discussion

Despite the differences among the various programs, the most significant fact is their relative commonality. All of them assume that some schools are better managed than others, and that such elements of better management can be identified. The programs want to recognize these better schools, and encourage others to adopt their evidently successful policies. Furthermore, while the contests do not disavow the importance of adequate school funding, in gen-

eral they are not terribly interested in seeing how the contestants spent large amounts of "new" money. The questions and criteria repeatedly focus on the basic elements of the school programs, e.g., homework, staff meetings, parent/school communication, pupil discipline, the maintenance of academic press, coherent policies. Different criteria are applied in order to measure such policies; some recognition systems give more weight to test scores than others. However, such differences are natural and appropriate at an early stage in a developmental effort. The test score approach can have merit when scores on fairly administered tests are available from comparable tests, and precise SES data are available for weighting comparisons. A more qualitative approach is advisable when comparisons are made among many differently situated schools, or where the credibility of the the testing process is questionable.

Another assumption underlying the programs is that administrators will respond to the incentive of competition, even if money is not the main incentive. While some of the rewards offered are reasonably substantial, (i.e., the $20,000 Ford grants), even such awards require contestants to go through a relatively arduous (and time-consuming) process. And $20,000 may only constitute .5% (one half of one percent) of the budget of a fairly large high school. It seems likely that the desire to be mentioned in a national press release--or to add such an attainment to one's vita--is just as much a stimulant to participants as the programmatic value of a small addition to their budget.

A final major assumption of the award programs is that we know enough about school effectiveness to justify some school award process. This assumption deserves deliberate consideration. On one hand, it is probably correct

to say that so far, the effective school research has provided us with interesting clues, as compared to definitive answers. (For typical cautionary remarks, see, e.g., Miller, 1981; Purkey and Smith, 1982; Rowan, 1982; for a more sympathetic portrayal, see D'Amico, 1982.) The most rigorous research in this field has been among quite limited pools of schools, where circumstances have lessened the number of variables to be considered. And even in such instances, the data collection process has been far more elaborate than that applied in the contest described. Indeed, given the limits of the effective school research, it is not surprising that the various awards promoters have been provoked to inject other school effectiveness values into the criteria applied. Thus, the Ford program submission asks some questions about the racial and sex mix of the staff of the participating school; similarly, the For Character form, inter alia, asks whether students are invited to participate in an opening ceremony (e.g., Salute to the Flag) each school day, and if the answer is "Yes," what percentage of the students actively participate.

However, it must be recognized that the relevance of such implicit criteria to most measures of school effectiveness is arguable. True, the form instructions in both the Ford and For Character program emphasize that no single (or even several) answers are determinative in the award process. Still, even after such honest qualifications are made, it is natural that different recognition systems will have different areas of emphasis--and that such differences go beyond matters justified by hard research. This is not to say that no research tends to support these different emphases, but that the findings supporting such differences ranges from robust to thin. But this uncertainty is inevitable, unless the award systems are to deal with only undisputed, trivial or very small pools of schools. School award programs should

not only be research-driven, but also drive research--through stimulating attention to unsettled research questions. In other words, for progress to occur, we must recognize that some award criteria must be partly based on ideological considerations, and not entirely hidden under the guise of pseudo-science.

The Matter of Incentives

The really important element of the school award approach is not the great quality of its research base (as far as criteria goes). Instead, its true originality is in its explicit concern with analyzing and recognizing effective schools regardless of their financial situations. After all, up until this time, the popular measures of school excellence have essentially been highly tied to pupil and community SES: teacher salaries, pupil/teacher ratios, test scores, National Merit Scholarship winners, costly adjunctive programs, and the like. Using such measures, a good school was essentially a high-budget school in a high-SES community, or a school applying high selectivity to its pupil input. It is true that almost all American schools have to be certified by accrediting agencies, but such accreditation--in the public mind--is solely a minimum-standard process. In operation, it is true that the accrediting evaluation process sometimes does recognize tacit, qualitative distinctions among schools, and some professionals also recognize such distinctions. But, in the large, schools have typically been distinguished as either "high quality," which means high budget or pupil input control, or merely accredited.

The school recognition approach has brought a different form of criterion into play. These criteria, theoretically, can make allowances for differences in pupil mix and school budget resources. And schools which "win" under such

criteria are invited to publicize their unique status. A whole new system of scoring may arise in the ballgame. And it may even change the way the players perform. Of course, as I have suggested, the new system of scoring is not entirely rational, i.e., research-based. And if the system lasts for 100 years it will still have important imperfections. We will never know enough to tell exactly how schools should be managed at this time so as to produce the types of adults who should live in some future version of our society, 10-40 years hence. There will always be matters of ideology and opinion. The virtue of the school award process is that it shifts us from a former gross misassumption to a less inadequate one.

The previous misassumption was that the criteria popularly applied---largely concerned with SES and pupil-input control--had some important intellectual base. This was an error. The true merit of the prior criteria was that it increased the budgets and administrative status of "excellent" school administrators, and cut down their pupil discipline problems (through keeping out potential troublemakers). The "less inadequate" assumption, underlying the award approach, is that we can identify school processes which make for excellence. Then we can award schools showing higher levels of such processes. Of course, we cannot perfectly identify such processes--thus we have an imperfect assumption. But, at least, in focussing on processes, as compared to budgets and programs, we are dealing with an intellectually significant question. Pupils are not educated by budgets (although teachers must be paid); they are educated by being put through certain processes by adults. The appropriate processes are the key, although in our society those processes must often be bought with dollars.

The merits of the award approach can be better appreciated if we contrast it with other forms of incentive--and non-incentive--systems existing in and around schools.

The most prominent of such incentive systems is the standard teacher salary applied in almost all public schools. This system provides pay increases for teachers only for (a) putting in time--acquiring seniority, and (b) taking and passing various graduate courses. This procedure probably describes the only ways 80-90% of American teachers can get raises for classroom work. The system is an incentive for teachers to stay alive, to stay out of serious trouble, and to take and pass graduate courses--often only of moderate relevance or difficulty. I know that many teachers do try and improve their work. However, such efforts at improvement are not especially encouraged by the current reward structure. Indeed, one can even imagine teachers who are consciously not putting in great efforts around their school, so they have energy left to take and pass their graduate work and get a raise. In such situations, the graduate work is a disincentive for the teacher doing a better job.

Another form of incentive is the salary schedules provided for different education administrators, especially building principals. I cannot easily generalize about national patterns in this matter. Still, it is my informed impression that rational incentive systems for principals, with specific goals tied to potential pay increments, are quite uncommon. Sometimes salary differentials are provided for principals (in the same system) with different size schools, but such differentials give little attention to whether "A" or "B" are doing better jobs.

In sum, the existing formal incentives for educators are often flimsy, and sometimes even arguably counterproductive. Against this backdrop, the school award approach is a refreshing breath of fresh air. It urges common-sense propositions, such as:

- Some schools are more effective than others
- Some people are more or less able than others
- The characteristics of effective schools and able people should be defined
- Recognition should be provided for more successful schools and able people
- The process of recognition will cause more good ideas to develop, and others to copy what is rewarded
- Where the definition of success is problematic, improved definitions will be derived from acting on current definitions, and making them subject to examination and controversy

Considering the For Character, Chicago, Criteria

We have established an intellectual framework. Now it is time to explicitly consider the unique criteria proposed by For Character, Chicago. And such criteria are largely those dealing with affirmative student character development.

In other words, the Chicago criteria about academic processes are not essentially dissimilar to those applied elsewhere--though there are surely differences which are methodologically significant (see, e.g., Villanova, 1981). But such differences do not go to ideology, but matters of mechanics. And even in the broad area of student character, there are some parallels among the different approaches. For instance, all approaches are presumably sympa-

thetic to the maintenance of order in a school. Still, For Character even has an additional emphasis regarding discipline: its form not only asks about the adequacy of the discipline code, but also whether it contains effective, realistic and vital provisions for consequences against violators.

More importantly, student character development is, for the Chicago group, a learning goal of equivalent importance with cognitive learning. Character is not only a neccessary incident for academic learning--there must be order for teaching to occur--it is an end in itself. And character development is more than staying out of trouble. It means that students should act affirmatively to be of help to others in the school, or in school-sponsored outside activities. Furthermore, just as most schools recognize and define degrees of excellence in academic learning, similar school policies should be followed regarding pro-social conduct.

There is an adequate research base to show that numerous schools, (and teachers), both public and private, do emphasize the goals of both academic learning and student character development (see, e.g., Wynne, 1980b). The only real ideological issue is whether both priorities should be recognized in an award system. Intellectually speaking, if one feels that both priorities are appropriate, a two-pronged award approach seems essential. Otherwise, student character development is relegated to a subordinate goal. And For Character is against such relegation. But the issue is not really analytical; sensible people all realize that when one thing is awarded, and another is not, a clear message is being given. The ideological fact is that many influential people do not believe it is just as "right" to coerce pupils into academic learning--and that is what we surely do--as it is to coerce them into being kind, truthful, and considerate.

Of course, coercion into good character does not work perfectly. But neither does coercion into academic learning. And, in both cases, we all appreciate that more effective "coercion" of students by educators must be judiciously coupled with persuasion, tact, ingenious presentation, and imagination--in other words, with good teaching. Still, after all such qualifications, apropos of academics, children are required to go to school, sit in their seats, do their exercises, and so on. <u>They are routinely coerced into learning.</u> Indeed, if a child is expelled from school, and freed from coercion, we are prone to scrutinize such a release with great care--to insure it was not for an unjustified purpose. In other words, if we were really against coercion in academic learning, we would regard expulsion as a special benefit. But of course that is not the case. Coercion towards academic learning is actually a <u>right</u> enjoyed by children. For Character simply believes that pupil coercion to learn good character is equally important and justified. It is justified for the same reasons we coerce pupils into academic learning; in the interest of the pupils, and of the society as a whole.

Understandably, the ability of schools to foster student character development is moderated by many factors, e.g., community norms, court decrees, the commitment of their teachers, the level of their conceptualization of their school goals. However, many external factors also constrain the efficacy of any school's academic program.

The award program approach emphasizes that care must be taken to avoid comparing apples and oranges. Thus, appropriate categories of schools must be identified for the purpose of comparison, so that allowances can be made for various constraints.

A Forecast and Prescription

Now that the current school award situation has been surveyed and analyzed, some general reflections are warranted:

The award approach is a comparatively low economic cost activity. It makes use of a developing area of research. And its premises are congruent with the general disenchantment with the school excellence criteria of the immediate past. It seems likely that the approach will persist, and be expanded.

Different award systems will either focus on limited goals, justified by comparatively rigorous research, or apply broader, more ideologic criteria. In the former case, the systems may be constrained to relatively trivial topics, or be encumbered with methodologic controversies. In the latter instance, the systems will become more adaptable, but then they will be subject to criticism as to the adequacy and justification for their criteria. Perhaps a variety of award systems will evolve, and pass through some form of competitive symbiosis, as each of them strives for more prominent public and professional recognition.

One virtue of the current award systems is that they are not compulsory--in contrast to systems which might be maintained in a school district, or mandated by a state education department. This very lack of compulsion has made the systems more adaptable and experimental. If particular schools do not like them, they do not have to compete. For the immediate future, it may be desirable for high proportions of recognition systems to maintain this voluntary element. Perhaps one cause for the decline in the vitality of the traditional accreditation systems is the fact that all schools must go through them. As a result, the systems are under great pressure to apply only minimum standards.

The awards given to individual schools may only be small amounts of money. However, we should not assume that good award systems can be done entirely on the cheap. The development and analysis of award criteria, and the making and justification of award decisions, takes time and talent. These are always precious resources. If these activities are carried out too casually, the award process will lose legitimacy, and be seen as governed by random chance and favoritism. Then good people will withdraw from the competition, or fail to apply the policies that have been rewarded. Furthermore, the awards themselves must be seen as prestigious. One form of prestige is an award of a large sum of money. But even if the dollar sum is modest, prestige may still be attached, if significant people, or large numbers of people, honor the awardees, or an attractive recognition ceremony is conducted. And measures of this sort again use scarce resources--human time, and imagination dedicated to planning.

We must also be concerned with the proportion of awardees. We are all familiar with using incentives to stimulate learning in classroom situations. We realize that creating only a few "winners," and many "losers," is ultimately a deterrent to most learners. The award structure should strive to identify a good number of "winners," and provide incentives to reward all other participants. Thus, the Ford program gave 50% of its participants $1,000 awards and about 25% of them got $20,000 grants. The For Character, Chicago program will have about 15 winners, will provide attractive certificates for all participants, and emphasizes the self-assessment aspects of its basic form. Furthermore, it hopes to stimulate communication among participating schools in its geographic area. Whether these various efforts will succeed is undetermined. Still, they suggest the aim of transforming the award process into more than a zero-sum game.

One can wonder if the award approach will go as far as I forecast. Still, it will surely be interesting to follow the course of its development.

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